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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001199

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/12/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH: FRUSTRATED WITH GOT INERTIA

REF: 04 ISTANBUL 1183

Classified By: CG DAVID ARNETT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary: In a July 11 introductory call with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Charge reaffirmed USG support for religious pluralism and freedom in Turkey, for the re-opening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island, and for Turkey's EU accession process as the best way forward for achieving progress on these issues. Bartholomew expressed frustration with the GOT's lack of movement since December 17 on the implementation of reforms, stating he would speak candidly in upcoming discussions with EU officials in Brussels, but agreed with Charge's assertion that continued deliberations within the EU framework would help, indicating he has no desire to derail that process. Bartholomew shared his expectation that Pope Benedict would visit Turkey in late November. He also conveyed profuse appreciation for USG assistance and advocacy. End summary.

2. (C) In a July 11 introductory call with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew hours before his departure to meet EU officials in Brussels, Charge reaffirmed USG support for religious pluralism and freedom in Turkey, for the re-opening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island, and for Turkey's EU accession process as the best way forward for achieving progress on these issues.

Halki: Simply No Political Will  
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3. (C) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew conveyed profuse appreciation for continued U.S. support, joking that "after God, we have the United States Government." But he expressed frustration with the continued closure of the Halki seminary, the lack of recognition of his ecumenical status, unresolved property issues, and other issues frustrating his community. He pointed out that these issues were explicitly mentioned in the EU progress report of October 2004, and must be addressed. He said the Minister of Education stated last summer that Turkey's legal framework could accommodate the re-opening of Halki, and the Patriarch asserted that there was simply no political will to make a move in that direction. He had hoped that any pre-October 3 move on Halki would have come during the summer, thus avoiding another lost academic year, but did not seem to hold out any faith of that happening. He told Charge he would neither exaggerate nor minimize his community's current situation during July 11-12 discussions with EU officials, including European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and EU Enlargement Commissioner Ollie Rehn, but would "speak the truth" about the issues.

GOT must understand its own interests  
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4. (C) Charge shared the Patriarch's frustration with the pace of implementation since December 17, stressed the importance of the EU process, and asked what specific, achievable steps the GOT could take in the near term to re-establish momentum in the reform process. Bartholomew agreed with Charge's assertion that continued deliberations within the EU framework would help, indicating he has no desire to derail that process. "We need to help (the government) understand its own interests," he said. In response to Charge's query, however, he seemed at a loss as to what to suggest, given his perception of a complete lack of movement on implementation issues this year. Upon his return from Brussels, he said, he will provide in written form the points covered there with his EU interlocutors.

Pope Benedict to visit Turkey?  
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5. (C) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew confirmed to Charge that he invited Pope Benedict XVI to visit Istanbul and said he expects the visit will take place o/a November 30. He stated that Charge should encourage the GOT to refrain from posing any obstacles to this visit, despite Pope Benedict's well known views on Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. The GOT should use such a visit to "convince" the Pope, he said, and to show him some "realities" in Turkey, including, he seemed to indicate by gesturing, his office and the Patriarchate building. Sharing recent photographs he had taken with Pope Benedict, as well as earlier photographs with

Pope John Paul II, Bartholomew said he had hoped for a visit from Pope John Paul last November (reftel) before the late Pope's health problems prevented him from traveling.  
ARNETT